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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Patriarchal Gender Roles in the Poetry and Essays of Adrienne Rich

Patriarchální genderové role v poezii a esejích Adrienne Rich

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyse selected works of the American feminist poet and essayist Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) in an attempt to unveil patriarchal gender roles and the way they impinged on women's lives in the twentieth century. In both her essays and poetry, Rich utilizes her own experience of a woman, a mother, and a lesbian in patriarchy, and simultaneously she explores women's position in society and the use of gender roles to control and limit women. This thesis argues that Rich employs the patriarchy-influenced and patriarchy-defined female gender roles of a daughter, a wife, and a mother to show both the ways these roles are used as means to dominate women as well as the female dissatisfaction with and evasion of these roles.

The theoretical part will first explore the definition of patriarchal society, then focus on defining gender roles, namely the three crucial female gender roles of a daughter, a mother, and a wife. It will also examine the changes female gender roles underwent in the twentieth century, introducing several concepts, and lastly mention the background of second-wave feminism and relevant points of Adrienne Rich's life and work.

The practical part will then analyse selected poems and essays by Rich chronologically, according to the timeline they come, or are expected to come, in a woman's life. The practical part will aim to uncover how the selected works depict the female experience in the patriarchy-influenced roles of a daughter, a wife, and a mother.

KEYWORDS

Adrienne Rich, gender roles, second-wave feminism, female experience, patriarchal society

ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat vybraná díla americké feministické básnířky a esejistky Adrienne Rich ve snaze popsat patriarchální genderové role a jejich dopad na životy žen ve 20. století. Ve svých esejích i poezii Rich zachycuje své vlastní zkušenosti homosexuální ženy a matky v patriarchátu a současně se snaží zmapovat pozici žen v této společnosti a demonstrovat způsoby, jakými jsou genderové role využívány ke kontrole a limitování žen. Tato práce poukazuje na to, že Rich užívá patriarchálně ovlivněné a patriarchálně definované ženské genderové role dcery, manželky a matky k tomu, aby dokázala, že v patriarchátu tyto role slouží k ovládání žen, a aby zobrazila nespokojenost žen a jejich snahu o únik před těmito stereotypními rolemi.

Teoretická část této práce se zaměří na definování patriarchální společnosti a genderových rolí, zvláště pak výrazných rolí dcery, manželky a matky, a také postihne proměny, kterými ženské genderové role prošly ve 20. století. Dále teoretická část zmíní pozadí druhé vlny feminismu a relevantní údaje o životě a tvorbě Adrienne Rich.

Praktická část práce zanalyzuje vybrané eseje a poezii A. Rich, při čemž bude postupovat chronologicky, na základě toho, jak dané role přichází (nebo jsou alespoň očekávány) v životě ženy. Praktická část usiluje o analýzu způsobů, jakými vybrané básně a eseje pracují s ženskou zkušeností v rámci genderových rolí dcery, manželky a matky.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Adrienne Rich, genderové role, druhá vlna feminismu, ženská zkušenost, patriarchální společnost

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Introduction

The works of Adrienne Rich (1929-2012), an American feminist poet, activist, and a key theorist of second-wave feminism, examine a variety of themes germane to the women's movement (Stein 1). In both her poetry and essays Rich utilizes her own experience of a woman in a patriarchal society and explores the meaning of motherhood, marriage, and lesbian identity. Her ideas about both the stereotypical gender roles, especially motherhood, and lesbian identity significantly shaped second-wave feminism. Rich's influence, however, reaches beyond the second wave, as her perception of androgyny and the lesbian continuum irrefutably influenced third-wave feminism.

The main aim of the thesis is to perform an analysis of selected poems and essays by Adrienne Rich, in which she focuses on patriarchy-defined female gender roles. This thesis argues that through examining the female gender roles of a daughter, a wife, and a mother, Rich delineates the ways patriarchal society affects, controls, and dominates women, and simultaneously she illustrates the female dissatisfaction with and resistance against these limiting gender stereotypes.

The theoretical part of this thesis aims to explore the understanding of patriarchal gender roles from the viewpoint of second-wave feminism. In order to do so, it inspects the meaning of patriarchy and gender roles, mainly focusing on the context of the second half of the twentieth century, the era of second-wave feminism. Then, the three major female gender roles of a daughter, a mother, and a wife will be discussed as well as the changes the notions of female gender roles underwent in the twentieth century. Lastly, the theoretical part will address the background of second-wave feminism and mention relevant points from Adrienne Rich's life and work.

The practical part will then analyse selected essays and poems of Adrienne Rich, which focus on the patriarchy-defined female gender roles of a daughter, a wife, and a mother. These will be explored chronologically, according to the timeline Rich experienced these roles and wrote about them, as well as according to the timeline they come, or are expected to come, in any woman's life. First, the role of a daughter will be examined on the essay "Motherhood and Daughterhood" and the two poems "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" and "Sibling Mysteries". The role of a wife, and the connected lesbian existence, will be observed within the essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" and the

poems “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” and “Twenty-One Love Poems”. Lastly, for the analysis of the mother role, the essay “Anger and Tenderness” and the poems “Night-Pieces: For a Child” and “Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff” have been chosen.

1 Theoretical Part

1.1 Patriarchy

When discussing feminist poetry, the position of women in society, and gender roles, it is crucial to establish a definition of patriarchy, which is both the background and the impetus for the efforts of the feminist movement. While the notion of patriarchy in human society is ever-present, the precise qualities of the establishment differ throughout the millennia.

Gerda Lerner acknowledges the twofold meaning of patriarchy in its narrow and broad definition, claiming that in "its narrow meaning, patriarchy refers to the system, historically derived from Greek and Roman law, in which the male head of the household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members" (238,239). The narrowness of the definition thus creates a misleading idea of historicity as it encompasses only the law-defined patriarchy from antiquity to the nineteenth century, when women gained particular civil rights (Lerner 239). This, however, is a misconception as, although it may no longer be enforced by law, men still hold power in society, whereas women are disadvantaged, even if not to such an extent as the first definition of patriarchy suggests. The said prevalence of patriarchy, derived from its original meaning, is accounted for within its wider characterization, where Lerner describes patriarchy as "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (239). In the broader sense, patriarchy refers not only to he law-enforced establishment, but also a norm passed on through handing-down patriarchal beliefs, whether they are legally enforced or not.

Similarly, Adrienne Rich frequently examines the concept of patriarchy as only through scrutinizing the patriarchal system and its oppressiveness towards women can the true nature of inequality be seen. Rich delves into the problematics of patriarchy and its patterns in the essay "The Kingdom of Fathers". Here she provides a definition:

> Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed

> under the male. It does not necessarily imply that no woman has power, or that all women in a given culture may not have certain powers. (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 57)

Rich offers a further insight into what Lerner has described as "society in general" in her definition. While some of the social concepts noted in Rich's definition are historically or locally given (such as law), others are omnipresent and, although patriarchy may no longer be officially acknowledged, undeniably invariable. One of these concepts is language which does not allow for a sufficient comprehension of the concept of female oppression as it is permeated by patriarchy. Since it is a man-made language, it has no need to find ways to describe women's struggle (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 58).

Kate Millett notices the exact institutionalization of patriarchy which both Rich and Lerner adopt in their definitions. She acknowledges the "birthright priority whereby males rule females" (25), and in doing so she also decodes the essence of the prevalence of patriarchy. The patriarchal patterns remain within the society, and regardless of the strides taken to establish equality, they are still deeply rooted within the core of each person, often unknowingly, affecting every aspect of life. And while the original concept of patriarchy is no longer employed, during the twentieth century, which is the prime focus of this thesis and the period when Millett produced her work, there were many strongly patriarchal issues, such as the pressure on women to be domestic, the significant difference in male and female education, the wage gap, which remains unsolved to the present day, and a variety of others which shape the female experience. Millett mainly assigns this to the universal and long-lasting nature of patriarchy, and its ability to be considered a natural order (58).

What frequently goes unnoticed is the fact that without the participation of women, patriarchy would be impossible. The participation, however, is not completely voluntary or intentional. It is fundamentally enabled by conditioning women to succumb to patriarchy from their early childhood through learning and internalizing their supposed inferiority (Lerner 218). The issue of "paternalistic dominance" (Lerner 217) is one through which access to information and opportunity is limited for women, who are considered inferior to men within the patriarchal system. This dominance over women had, and still has, many forms, including limiting education and denying female history, conditioning female sexuality, and countless other acts of discrimination (Lerner 217).

The concept of patriarchy being natural, given by the biological differences between the male and female, is flawed. The biologically given labour division, such as the male – hunter and female – mother, do not insinuate a relationship of dominance and submission, as they simply fulfil different, yet equally crucial needs (Lerner 18). However, recent studies have questioned even the prehistoric division of roles, as biologically female remains have been found alongside a hunter's tool, suggesting that the role of a hunter was not solely male (Wei-Haas). And while it is the male-focused biology that is often the foundation for the reasoning behind male-dominated societies, it is misleading, as "[m]ale supremacy, like other political creeds, does not finally reside in physical strength but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological" (Millett 27). In a society of technology, there is no necessity for the dominance of one group over another.

1.2 The Position of Women in Society and Gender Roles

1.2.1 Gender

In exploring the meaning and nature of gender roles, it is vital to inspect the meaning of gender itself. The twenty-first century's debate concerning gender has significantly advanced and diverged from the approach of the twentieth century, however, the following passages intend to concentrate on gender as perceived and as germane to the twentieth century, although it undeniably omits many of the crucial concepts of the modern gender perception, such as gender fluidity and the nonbinary nature of gender. Nevertheless, these ideas were already discussed within second-wave feminism in the works of many activists, including Adrienne Rich, who frequently employed the concept of androgyny. While the third wave of feminism irrefutably transformed the ideas of both gender and the feminist movement, the third-wave concepts will not be explored, as the main focus of this thesis is specifically gender roles as described through second-wave feminism in the second half of the twentieth century.

Second-wave feminism stressed the need to distinguish between the concepts of sex and gender, the former being biologically given, whereas the latter is established through culture and society (Wienclaw 15, 16). Suzanne Pennington points to the seeming correlation between the biologically given male/female nature of sex, and the culturally established ideas of masculinity/femininity, which include "the body (through body modifications such

as cutting hair), dress, comportment, and social interaction and discourse" (367). Often, however, adherence to these gender expectations is rather unattainable.

Ruth A. Wienclaw provides a further insight into the sex/gender distinction, claiming that gender "helps" to establish social roles (16). That is perhaps an incorrectly or unfortunately worded definition. Although in some instances gender diversification is convenient, more frequently it is rather obstructive or even detrimental to one's identity. Especially female identity is diminished through the perception of its gender as weaker or less than. Once again it is vital to establish that, despite the differences between male/female, according to the second-wave perception it is only through culture and social learning that the female is perceived as inferior. Through socialization children adopt the socially and culturally acceptable behaviour for their gender and the prejudices associated with the behaviour (Kretchmar 46-49). Kate Millett notes that "all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression" (31).

The socialization and learning of gender roles are culturally as well as temporally determined. Wienclaw provides an example of both of these influences. Firstly, there are significant differences between so-called Western culture, specifically Northern American, and the culture of indigenous peoples in the perception of women and their position within the social hierarchy. Secondly, temporal changes are recognized, as the role of the domestic woman typical until the end of the twentieth century is "no longer the norm (or at least not the only acceptable norm)" (Wienclaw 34).

1.2.2 Gender Roles in Patriarchy

The second wave saw the nature of gender roles as "a set of expected actions and dispositions ascribed to an individual on the basis of her or his assumed biological sex" (Santore 371). These are thus expectations that differ from one gender to another, and which are supposedly correlated to the abilities of male/female individuals.

It is crucial to note the variability of gender roles and the shift in certain characteristics and expectations imposed on men and women, including the aforementioned law-enforced dominance of men over women and the necessitated domesticity of women. And even though the qualities of gender roles are altered through the efforts of the feminist

movements, due to the establishment of patriarchy, which naturally assumes the superiority of men, the roles a woman takes on, whether they are achieved or ascribed, continue to be seen as inferior to those assumed by men.

Although some gender roles are biologically given, they are heavily prompted by stereotypes inflicted by patriarchy. One example of that is the role of mother in the twentieth century. It is a natural, biologically given role of a woman, however, through the means of patriarchy, it is regarded as domestic, considered inferior to the labour performed by men who work in the public sphere and provide for the family financially. From a biological perspective it is plausible that the male/female characteristics would differ, however, the possibility of these traits being not only male or female but rather variable from individual to individual is often disregarded, and it leads to distorted gender stereotypes which often devalue the traits traditionally deemed female (Huntoon 381).

These stereotypes pervade every aspect of life, from personality, behaviour, work and education, to appearance and communication. Regardless of the changes gender roles have undergone in Western societies, these gender stereotypes remain unchanged, leading to deviance from these deeply ingrained beliefs which inevitably causes "uneasiness, confusion, fear, and hostility" (Huntoon 378). While the gender stereotypes vary in different cultures, typical for the predominantly Christian societies is the opposition of male and female characteristics, where the male represents individuality, public endeavour, dominance, and stoicism, whereas the female is the polar opposite of the male – domestic, submissive, pure, and emotional (Huntoon 379).

1.2.3 Female Gender Roles

There are several gender stereotypes a woman is to internalize according to patriarchal standards. First are the aforementioned personality traits. A woman is expected to learn desirable passivity, domesticity, and submissiveness. In her highly influential 1949 book *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir claims that the initial impetus for the female-passive connotation is the use of dolls. Girls are supposed to identify with their dolls, which remind them of their bodies, yet they are completely passive, whereas the boy is taught to be the active, dominant one (de Beauvoir 283). The passivity of women is also acquired through the acts of the parents. The young girl sees her mother's role in the family, she is initiated into the labour of women, being required to participate in housework, kept out of

the “man’s world” her male counterpart is encouraged to explore. Through observing the mother, she sees the woman performing the domestic tasks while the father steps out into the public sphere, “[t]he masculine half of an ideological division of the social world into public and private realms that developed with the industrialization of the Western world in the nineteenth century” (Wells 462). In the first half of the twentieth century, the suffrage movement enabled and normalized female education and careers, however, after the Second World War, the number of women receiving college or university education lowered significantly (Friedan 142). As well as that, the focus of male and female education diverged. Women were being prepared for their role as a mother and a wife, further perpetuating the domestic/public divide (Friedan 150).

These traits and principles are taught and exercised in the three main roles a woman is expected to assume, the role of a daughter, a wife, and a mother. All three of these are heavily influenced by patriarchal standards and promote yielding to the desires of the men who hold economic and social power over women, as well to the desires of the general patriarchy-influenced society.

A Daughter

The gender division and aim for the domestication of women can be seen in the gender biased upbringing of the daughter and the son. De Beauvoir notes that unlike the boy who is supported in his search for individuality and ambition for the future, the girl “is twelve years old and already her story is written in the heavens” (301). It is unclear at such a young age what career path the boy will take, yet the prime focus of his upbringing is to assure his success in future life, whereas the girl is taught from her early childhood she is supposed to become a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother – always subservient to her male counterpart, be it the father or the husband. While the boy is also expected to eventually become a husband and a father, he is not being meticulously prepared for these roles. Christina Boufis discusses this on the background of psychoanalysis:

> [M]ost psychoanalysts believe that biology alone determined the psychosexual processes of adolescence, which for girls was thought to seal their passive role in life. The main tasks of adolescence—separation and individuation—which involve relinquishing family ties in favor of new love objects, are often perceived to be more conflicted in girls’ development. (Boufis 9)

The son is supposed to break the natural bond with the mother, thus giving up the traditionally feminine characteristics – emotionality, submissiveness, passivity. Debora Weiner sees the separation not as caused by biological sex differences, but claims it happens to enable "a dominant role: to be able to dominate they must learn to see themselves as separate, different, and superior" (176). The son assumes the position of the dominant, individual being while the daughter is taught her value in terms of her biological functions and her place within the home. Furthermore, the concept of dualism, the breaking of the mother/son bond and the continuation of mother/daughter bond, endorses conflicting attitudes in the male and female and leads to the perception of male/female as polar opposites (Weiner 176).

When discussing the female identity crisis caused by the lack of individuality, Friedan delves into the problematic of matrophobia, a term later coined by Lynn Sukenick (Cody 364). She claims that the daughter sees her mother as unfulfilled, even unhappy, or desperate within her role as a housewife and attempts to separate from her mother, fearing she will become her (Friedan 67). Therefore, the only possible choice a young woman has is to identify more with her father, who assumes the public, individual role she desires to reach (Cody 364).

A Wife

As the young woman becomes an adult, the model role of an obedient daughter shifts into the role of a no less compliant wife. As the boy matures, he turns into a man who is encouraged to enter the outside world on his own, whereas the girl is passed on into the hands of her husband, often without being given an opportunity for self-realization outside the family life.

Simone de Beauvoir remarks that marriage is drastically different for men and women, since "there is no symmetry in the situations of the two sexes; for girls marriage is the only means of integration in the community, and if they remain unwanted, they are, socially viewed, so much wastage" (417). The institution of marriage is socially desired for both men and women, however, society does not prescribe that a man must get married in order to fulfil his role.

This can be observed within the spinster/bachelor dynamic. Robert Lakoff decodes the meaning of the terms, claiming that although the two are denotatively parallel, it is the

connotation that separates them – a bachelor is a man who "has been pursued and has successfully eluded his pursuers, […] a spinster is one who has not been pursued, or at least not seriously" (66). This connotation of an unmarried woman as undesirable points to the social prestige and sense of supposed fulfilment a woman gains through the act of marriage. The man's patriarchally given place is within the public sphere, where he is independent, and his value is estimated through the work he does for society (de Beauvoir 416). The woman, on the other hand, fulfils her patriarchally given role within the home and thus, if unmarried, she fails to satisfy the patriarchal standards.

Even though there was a significant shift within the domestic/public division in the twentieth century, as a greater number of women started working outside the home, much of the responsibility for domestic chores still heavily falls on women (Wienclaw 79). The performance of the domestic roles and the traits regarded as feminine, thus considered unsuitable for the public sphere, further amplify the supposed inferiority of women and the patriarchal belief that the main purpose of female life is being a housewife and a mother. Patriarchy's perception of women's position, which was still significant in the second half of the twentieth century, considers the career of the wife counterproductive to her domestic duties. It creates a feeling of immense guilt in women as "they cannot take on all the domestic responsibilities involved in child care and housework as well as all the duties and activities associated with their careers" (Wienclaw 81). Even if the woman attempted to find her individual path, independent of her role as a caregiver, typically she was perceived as either less qualified than a man and therefore unfitting for the job or too focused on her work, which hindered her from fulfilling domestic duties, creating guilt and shame for realizing herself outside of the home.

A Mother

Lastly, the role of a mother is perceived as the foremost purpose of a woman's life. There are two main constituents of motherhood that need to be observed. Firstly, there is the biological nature of motherhood, the natural act of childbearing, and secondly, the social role connected with the act of motherhood, especially when determined by patriarchy.

Simone de Beauvoir acknowledges motherhood as a "physiological destiny" a woman desires to fulfil, "since her whole organic structure is adapted for the perpetuation of the species" (467). Although it is natural for any species to feel the desire to reproduce,

within human society, nature is not the only aspect that needs to be taken into consideration. Especially in modern times it is imperative that women have the choice of whether to fulfil their "physiological destiny" or not. What needs to be accounted for, and what frequently is the rationale for not having children, is the social expectations imposed on motherhood by patriarchy. Rich notes that "[b]iological motherhood has long been used as a reason for condemning women to a role of powerlessness and subservience in the social order" (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 77). In motherhood, the woman is expected to surrender her identity and individuality to the needs of the child, similarly to how she was taught to succumb to men her entire life.

Oftentimes, a woman cannot be or does not want to be a mother. In either of these cases, she is considered inferior in the eyes of society, as the notion of becoming a mother was one of the prime foci of her life from her childhood. Similarly to marriage, a woman's life in patriarchy is judged by her capabilities as a mother. Adrienne Rich notes that we "speak of women as 'nonmothers' or 'childless'; we do not speak of 'nonfathers' or 'childless men', (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 196) again pointing to the dualism whereby men are valued according to their individual contributions to society, whereas women are judged predominantly by their ability to procreate and care.

Rich also distinguishes between the twofold nature of motherhood – as an experience, and as an institution. The former is the bond formed with the child, which she deems a "profound experience" (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 197), the latter is the identity forced onto women through patriarchy, in which not having children is seen as aberrant. The institution of motherhood is extremely detrimental to women, as it poses unfeasible expectations, which entirely abolish the mother's identity as an individual human being and unify her with the needs, the capabilities, and the failures of the child.

1.2.4 Female Gender Roles in the Twentieth Century

Female gender roles underwent major changes in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the development was not linear, always providing a new level of equality between men and women, as can be seen from the regression in the 1950s. The suffrage movement was nearly forgotten after the Second World War and instead arose the era of "the feminine mystique", which shares very apparent similarities with the Victorian idea of the angel in the house.

Some of the roles traditionally assigned to women persisted, although they are not enforced, or are no longer in conflict with different roles. The last third of the twentieth century saw a significant development in the relationship of women to the public sphere. The roles of a mother and a caregiver are still prescribed to women as the norm, but nowadays it is much less frequent that a woman would base her identity solely on her home labour and the role of a housewife. She also has many more opportunities in the public sphere to pursue her individual ambitions, perhaps through her career. To see the changes in the twentieth century, it is essential to discuss several concepts that have shaped the female gender roles and approach to women in general.

The Angel in the House and Its Influence

Before the gender role situation in the twentieth century can be explored, it is crucial to first mention the concept of "the angel in the house." Although this term describes women's situation in the Victorian era, whose end marked the beginning of the twentieth century, there are certain aspects of this idea that strongly resemble the position of women in the 1950s and 1960s, which Betty Friedan considers "the feminine mystique."

The term is derived from the 1858 Coventry Patmore poem titled "The Angel in the House". In the poem, Patmore describes the perfect woman – angelic, devout, modest (48). While the intention of Patmore was to praise the ideal woman, there are several parts of the poem that strongly suggest that he, as did the whole of the nineteenth-century society, thought of the perfect woman as subservient to her husband. One example of that can be seen within the lines:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
> Of his condoled necessities
> She casts her best, she flings herself. (Patmore 105)

Although the tone remains loving, it indisputably conveys the idea of men as superior, claiming that a woman takes pleasure in pleasing her husband. The ideal woman was first and foremost an obedient wife, a mother, and someone who had no desires beyond pleasing her husband. And amid performing all the difficult housework, she was supposed to keep her nearly celestial beauty.

In the essay "Professions for Women", Virginia Woolf discusses the issue of the angel in the house. Here Woolf describes the angel as sympathetic, charming, unselfish, and more importantly "so constituted that she never had in mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure" (202). In order to become an individual with the prospect of a career, in Woolf's case a writer, the woman needs to kill the angel, as the description of woman as not having a mind of her own and not expressing her opinions and ideas, is incompatible with any female role outside of the house.

The idea of the angel in the house and the extreme difficulties that accompanied the expectations women needed to fulfil in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is also explored within Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper". It gives an image of a young woman struggling to adapt to her role as a mother, a wife – an angel in the house. The woman in the story is helpless, imprisoned by the rest cure prescribed by her husband, who dominates her not only from his position in the marriage, but also from the position of her doctor, leaving her no means of escaping her life (Showalter 342).

The Suffrage Movement

The nineteenth-century ideals imposed on women were an impetus for the rise of the women's movement. The first wave of feminism in the United States has its beginnings at the 1848 Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. From then on, the fight for equal rights developed through the establishment of female organizations, such as the National Woman's Suffrage Association in 1869. The main aim was to ensure equality between men and women, starting with the implementation of the right to vote for American women. After the extensive and rigorous efforts of the suffrage movement, the law was warranted by the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 (Madsen 3-6). In 1923, the suffrage movement had also introduced the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which was supposed to further guarantee equality between men and women. However, the attempts to implement the ERA continued throughout the twentieth century, never being successful, as the ERA was never ratified (Madsen 8).

Gerhard examines the gender role problematics of the first wave of feminism. She differentiates between the suffrage movement and the 1920s flappers, who "were eager to distinguish themselves from suffragists and settlement house workers, whom they viewed as

spinsters antagonistic toward men" (17). Despite the antipathy between the groups, their aim was essentially very similar – to bring women out of the domestic sphere and into the public. Both the suffragists and the flappers attempted to depict women as more than just mothers and caregivers, albeit in very different ways. Whether it was through engagement in the political affairs of the suffragists, or the light-hearted, liberated lifestyle of the 1920s flappers, they provided an image of women as individuals, far more diverse and distinct than the uniform nineteenth-century prescription of women as mothers and housewives.

The Feminine Mystique

The feminist efforts of the suffragists were much less prominent after the implementation of the right to vote. Nevertheless, The Second World War marked a significant shift towards employing women in the public sphere. Women actively participated in the war industry and their importance outside the home was evident. After the war, however, this changed drastically with men returning home. Women were once again limited to their domestic roles, the housewifery was glamourized in the media, and the domestication caused dissatisfaction and unfulfillment (Birkle 13). The image of the female heroine Rosie the Riveter, who represented an independent woman challenging the traditional division of labour, disappeared in the post-war media, and instead was replaced with the image of a perfect housewife, similar to the nineteenth-century angel in the house (Meyerowitz 1479).

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* discusses "the problem that has no name" that is the frustration of domesticated middle-class women. In her work, Friedan elaborates the situation of women in the post-war era. Her work was influenced by de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex,* which described the concept of "the Other," whereby the man "is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (16). The concept of the Other, which inherently puts men into the superior positions, relates to the domestic roles of women post-war.

Friedan notes that "[f]ulfillment as a woman had only one definition for American women after 1949 – the housewife-mother" (38). However, the feeling of fulfilment frequently did not arrive. The women seemingly had happy lives, according to the patriarchal standards, but they were unhappy, unfulfilled. Young women, conditioned to believe that their main purpose in life is housewifery and motherhood, could not see the underlying cause of their unhappiness and instead felt guilty about not being fulfilled by their lives. The issue

of the feminine mystique is that it "is so powerful that women grow up no longer knowing that they have the desires and capacities the mystique forbids" (Friedan 61).

Friedan largely attributes this to the fact that post-war education had become significantly gender biased. For men, the focus was gaining expertise in a certain field which would help them establish their role in the public sphere, whereas for women, "[i]nstead of opening new horizons and wider worlds to able women, the sex-directed educator moved in to teach them adjustment within the world of home and children" (Friedan 149). Instead of being given the space to realize themselves within the public sphere, women were taught to be mothers and wives, having their possibilities restricted to such an extent they felt deviant for desiring a life outside of their home. According to the sex-directed educators, women were supposed to be educated in family and home management, adapting to their domestic life (Friedan 18). Women who were not satisfied with their lives were unable to understand the primary source of their unfulfillment until Friedan gave them the words to name the problem.

It is necessary to establish the feminine mystique as a phenomenon which strongly affected women in the 1950s and 1960s, but it is also crucial to note the stigmatizing idea of the "Lavender Menace," a term coined by Friedan to describe lesbians as a threat to the feminist movement, which directly served the purpose of alienating lesbians within second-wave feminism (Potter 211). Friedan's personal attitude was rather homophobic and dismissive towards non-heterosexual women, but her ideas resonated with a much more heterogenous group than just the category of white, middle-class, heterosexual housewives. Potter notes the diverse nature of the lesbian community within the second wave, claiming that many of the women had been in a heterosexual marriage, and were mothers (212). It is then evident that the feminine mystique affected not only the heterosexual, middle-class women, who served as the ideal and the only demographic to Friedan's research, but also many other women, including the "Lavender Menace." Perhaps the outcome, which was the escape from patriarchal marriage, was different for the heterosexual and the lesbian women, but the initial lack of fulfilment and often involuntary attachment to the domestic life was omnipresent.

1.3 Second-Wave Feminism

1.3.1 Influences and Aims

After the implementation of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the nationwide women's movement was suppressed by the economic crisis of the 1930s and the Second World War (Madsen 3-6). It was only in the 1950s that the feminist movement began to spread again in the United States (Lindsey 155).

The second wave of feminism dates from the 1960s to the 1980s. There were several significant events that triggered the start of the second wave in the United States. Firstly, it was the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women by President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1961, which "issued a report documenting the inferior position of women in the United States" (Lindsey 155). Secondly, it was the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, which discussed the subservient position of women in their caregiver and housewife roles. Furthermore, the second wave was significantly shaped by the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, one of whose founders was Betty Friedan (Madsen 7).

The aims of the second wave were manifold. The popularity of the motto "the personal is the political" clearly shows that second-wave feminists viewed the intimate, often taboo topics of abortion, domestic roles of women, domestic violence, and a variety of others as part of the political debate regarding women and it was necessary to discuss those issues publicly in order to solve them and ensure equality (Maxwell and Shields 7, 8). For second-wave feminists the defining point of the oppression against women was the very structure of patriarchy, which implied the dominant position of men "rooted in the unconscious and enacted sexually" (Gerhard 194) and thus it was necessary to explore the patriarchal structures using the female perspective. Another major aim of the second wave of feminism was the implementation of the Equal Rights Amendment, however the efforts regarding ERA have not been successful (Madsen 8).

Nevertheless, it is also vital to emphasise the multifocality of second-wave feminism. Evans notes that "feminism in the 1970s was a decentered movement, whose parts were not necessarily in communication with one another" (26). Roth discusses the plural feminisms taking place within the second wave and claims that it must be viewed as "a group of feminisms, movements made by activist women that were largely organizationally distinct

from one another, and from the beginning, largely organized along racial/ethnic lines" (3). Despite there being a variety of feminist movements, including various women of colour movements (Roth specifically mentions the Black and the Chicana movements), the second wave tends to be whitewashed in literature, diminishing the efforts of women of colour (Roth 7). This is also caused by the intolerance within some of the feminist organizations. One example of that is NOW's discrimination against both lesbian feminists and women of colour, as they were frequently absent from the core development of the movement, and the aims of NOW disregarded their experiences and hardships, despite the fact that some of the founding members were women of colour.

The multifocality of the second wave brought about a variety of women's organizations. After the establishment of the National Organization for Women, which primarily attracted white, middle-class, heterosexual women, more diverse and inclusive groups followed. These included the National Welfare Rights Organization or the National Women's Political Caucus (Lindsey 156). In 1969, a group called the Redstockings was established, which was one of the more radical groups speaking on taboo topics such as abortion (Redstockings). It is also crucial to note the organizations created by and for women of colour, namely the Third World Women's Alliance, Combahee River Collective, or the National Black Feminist Organization (Roth 7-11).

1.3.2 Lesbian Feminism

A specific part of second-wave feminism were lesbian feminists, a group that included Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Mary Daly, or Jane Alpert, who "promoted a new vision of women's bodies as the source of female power" (Gerhard 158). For lesbian feminists, one of the key foci was the patriarchal society, which forcibly instilled the idea of heterosexuality as the only possible way of life, and the attempt to change these structures.

The Boston Women's Health Book Collective *Our Bodies, Ourselves* became immensely popular after its publishment in 1973, as it provided information about female sexual health as well as lesbian identity (Potter 210). The lesbian feminists were often separated from the heterosexual feminists, as can be seen in Friedan's use of the term "Lavender Menace" to describe lesbian women as a disruptive element to the movement (Potter 213). The undeniable racism and homophobia within the feminist movement, especially surrounding the National Organization for Women, culminated in the 1977

National Women's Conference in Houston (Potter 211). This finally led to a more broadly recognized understanding of the necessity for uniting despite differences to achieve the general feminist goals, namely the equality that the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) would provide.

As previously mentioned, one of the key topics of lesbian feminists was the patriarchal influence on women's sexuality and ultimately their lives in general. Many feminists, including Adrienne Rich, then claim that in the climate of patriarchal society it is impossible for women to freely profess their sexual identity, be it hetero or homosexual (Gerhard 179).

1.3.3 Radical Feminism

Another significant part of the second-wave feminist movement was the radical movement. Among the theorists proclaiming a radical view of feminism were the aforementioned lesbian authors such as Mary Daly, Audre Lord, Adrienne Rich or Shulamith Firestone. Crucial to radical feminism were the works of Kate Millett, who examined patriarchy as the means of female oppression and sexuality as an instrument of male power (Gerhard 95).

Many of the radical feminists claimed that their feminism was derived from de Beauvoir's rather than Friedan's ideas. The reason for this was the fact that de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* sees patriarchy as the root of the female struggle, whereas Friedan simply sees it as a result of a lack of equality, not of the existence of patriarchy (Henry 69).

The radical movement was closely interconnected and often overlapping with the lesbian movement in the attempts to dismantle the ideas of compulsory heterosexuality as well as the general effect of patriarchy on women's lives. Radical feminists saw patriarchy as a means through which men established gender domination over women and through which female sexuality was repressed (Madsen 152). Both the lesbian and the radical feminist theories argue that women are oppressed through their sexuality, which is shaped by patriarchal society (Madsen 155).

The overlapping of these two groups and their shared intentions are clear from the 1970 Radicalesbians manifesto *The Woman Identified Woman,* which explores patriarchal recognition of women. The manifesto argues that through "having been brought up in a male society, [women] have internalized the male culture's definition of [themselves]"

(Radicalesbians 3). The patriarchal society perceives women through their reproductive, sexual, and domestic roles, restricting women from finding an individual path in the same way men do. Only through male acceptance is "true" womanhood validated in patriarchy.

This is what the Radicalesbians, as well as the whole radical and lesbian feminism movement, attempted to dismantle. It is crucial for female liberation that women are no longer defined by their relationships with men, and instead are defined by their individual characteristics, regardless of sexuality or reproductive abilities. (Radicalesbians 4) Potter notes that "the displacement of men from feminist community" is "a real possibility for the revolution" (209).

The idea of the woman-identified woman is closely interconnected with Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality, which questions the very nature of the male/female relationship. Similarly to the manifesto, Rich highlights the initial relationships between a mother and a daughter, as well as the way heterosexuality is used as a means of female oppression and control in patriarchy ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 633).

1.4 Adrienne Rich

1.4.1 Life

Adrienne Rich was an American feminist poet, essayist, and activist born in 1929 in Baltimore, Maryland (Stein 179). Rich was born into a family of both Jewish and Christian descent. In her essay "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity" Rich recognizes the multitude of identities she had to accept as her own in order to truly find herself, and she provides an enumeration of all the things she once was: "white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle-class, feminist, exmatriate southerner, split at the root" (*Blood, Bread, and Poetry* 122).

Rich's parents, Arnold and Helen Jones Rich, provided her with a middle-class, educated upbringing. Rich was supported in her aims to reach academic success, but despite the access to education, she experienced the domineering nature of her father, as her mother had abandoned her career to become a housewife. In her essays, Rich reminisces about the difficult relationship she had with both her parents, and how only after the birth of her own children did she rekindle the relationship with her mother (*Of Woman Born* 222).

Having graduated from Radcliffe College, she travelled Europe and started to publish her poetry. In 1953 she married an economist, Alfred H. Conrad, and within just four years she gave birth to her three sons (Stein 179). Her relationship with Conrad was hampered by the distancing of Rich's parents from her husband, due to his previously failed marriage and orthodox Jewish background (Stein 15). In her essay "Anger and Tenderness" Rich mentions that her husband "was a sensitive, affectionate man who wanted children and who […] was willing to 'help'," (*Of Woman Born* 27) yet he made it evident to Rich that he did so out of generosity and that his professional life surmounted her struggle as a mother and a writer. Rich noted that before the birth of her third son, she had decided to be sterilized. For Rich, motherhood is always divided into two separate units, which closely follow her own mothering experience – motherhood as a relationship between the mother and her children, and motherhood as a patriarchal institution, oppressive and limiting. Rich's views and sexuality inevitably caused the separation of the couple, closely followed by her husband's suicide in 1970 (Birkle 126).

Later on, Rich started to explore the concept of lesbian existence and compulsory heterosexuality, both in her writings and her personal life. From 1976, Rich lived with her partner, Jamaican-American author Michelle Cliff (Stein 16). All throughout her life and the significant changes Rich experienced, she continued to write poetry and essays strongly influenced by her own life experience both within the traditionally patriarchal system and outside of it. On March 27, 2012, Adrienne Rich died due to the complications of her rheumatoid arthritis, leaving behind a greatly influential legacy of feminist poetry and prose (Fox).

1.4.2 Work

Shortly after graduating college, Rich published her first collection of poetry, *A Change of World* (1951). The success was followed by *The Diamond Cutters* (1955). Both of the collections adopt a feminist viewpoint through describing the female struggle in the post-war world. However, they are strongly riddled with formalism, "marked by skillfully executed rhythms and a tone shaped by balance" (Shima 38). Rich herself noted that she was "exceptionally well grounded in formal technique" (*What Is Found There* 195) and yet the formal, regular techniques employed in her early works constricted her expression. It was undoubtedly caused by her upbringing and her introduction to literature through reading works of the "masters" – Blake, Keats, Shelley, Whitman and "the domesticated versions of

Dickinson" (Rich, *What Is Found There* 190). Only later did her inspiration began to widen from the canonical writers and with that she retired from the uncompromising use of form, which allowed a significantly more open and genuine portrayal of the female struggle.

For Rich, the poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" (1963) presented a transition between her writing dependent on an exact form and a much "longer looser mode" (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 44). This was followed by the collections *Necessities of Life* (1966) and *Leaflets* (1969), in which Rich shows her attitudes towards political topics, such as her pacifist disapproval of the Vietnam war. The turn towards more radical themes can be fully recognized in *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), as it became considered an archetype for feminist poetry exploring difficult and taboo topics. Rich was selected to receive the National Book Award, yet she "accepted it only together with Audre Lorde and Alice Walker in the name of all women" (Birkle 118).

The next step in the criticism of patriarchy and the expectations imposed on women through these structures was her coming-out, followed by openly lesbian poetry, such as *Twenty-One Love Poems* (1976), which describe the struggle of lesbian women in a hostile society. In *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) Rich discusses the notion of man-made language which disables women from sufficiently communicating their experience (Stein 81).

Rich's later poems, which include numerous collections including *Time's Power* (1989), *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991), *Fox* (2001) or *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve* (2011), focus on the quest of finding one's identity, not only as a woman in a patriarchal world, but also as a lesbian alienated by compulsory heterosexuality. As well as that, Rich explores a variety of cultures and is no longer bound to the English speaking, predominantly white male authors she was raised reading. Instead, her works are inspired by a variety of cultures and poems read in translation, as it is only through observing cultures different from our own that one can fully comprehend the diversity of human experience (Stein 97).

Adrienne Rich was not only a poet, but also an essayist. Her essays typically focus on her experiences as a mother, a woman, a lesbian, and a poet. The collection of essays *Of Woman Born* (1976) explores the role of a mother in the society of the twentieth century and the hardships that come along with the role. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1979) focuses on the general notions of what it means to be a woman in patriarchal society, describing both

personal and professional struggles. Her last collection of essays, *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society* (2009), presents texts concerned with a variety of authors from different cultural backgrounds.

2 Practical Part

The practical part of this thesis will examine the three patriarchy-influenced and patriarchy-defined female gender roles of a daughter, a wife, and a mother in the works of Adrienne Rich. They will be examined chronologically, in the order they typically come, or are expected to come, in a woman's life – first a daughter, then a wife, and finally a mother.

Rich utilizes her works to critique the patriarchy-defined female gender roles. The patriarchal influence can be seen in the male dominance of women in any role they fulfil in their life, from the father, who holds power over his daughter, to the husband, who dominates his wife.

Furthermore, Rich's works depict the female resistance against these roles, giving significance to even the slightest, almost undetectable ones, which can be seen in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers". Frequently, women-defined relationships are offered as an alternative to the patriarchy-influenced relationships with men, in the form of the lesbian relationship in "Twenty-One Love Poems", as well as in the form of female friendships and sisterhood.

2.1 A Daughter

2.1.1 "Motherhood and Daughterhood"

The concept of daughterhood, as well as the bond between a mother and a daughter, is often examined within feminist works, as both an experience and a metaphor for the growth and unity of women, which is similar to the metaphor of sisterhood. The relationship is, however, frequently dismissed in patriarchy. Freudian psychoanalysis depicts a variety of intergenerational conflicts yet demeans the relationship between a mother and a daughter as one dependent on the concept of penis envy, completely disregarding the nature of the female bond (Chodorow 95). However, according to psychoanalysts who revise the basic Freudian concepts, the mother/daughter relationship serves "as a model of female subject-formation" (Mukherjee 143).

Rich's essay "Motherhood and Daughterhood" provides a deep insight into the perception of daughterhood, drawing from literature, Rich's own experience, and the examination of the mother/daughter relationship in patriarchal society. For Rich, one of the key overlooked issues regarding motherhood and daughterhood is the primary nurturance the mother provides:

> The earliest enwrapment of one female body with another can sooner or later be denied or rejected, felt as choking possessiveness, as rejection, trap, or taboo; but it is, at the beginning, the whole world. Of course, the male infant also first knows the tenderness, nourishment, mutuality from a female body. But institutionalized heterosexuality and institutionalized motherhood demand that the girl-child transfer those first feelings of dependency, eroticism, mutuality, from her first woman to a man, if she is to become what is defined as a "normal" woman – that is, a woman whose most intense psychic and physical energies are directed towards men. (*Of Woman Born* 218, 219)

The mother/daughter relationship is corrupted by patriarchal society, which attempts to prevent strong relationships between women. Despite, or perhaps because of the shared female experience, the bond between the two women is severed, forcing the young woman to transfer the intimate bond onto a man. However, Rich also renders it impossible to fully erase the relationship and feelings provided by the female figure (*Of Woman Born* 220). Nancy Chodorow likewise explores the primal nature of the relationship with the mother. While the Oedipal complex is frequently discussed in Freudian psychoanalysis, the relationship which would naturally occur in girls as well is dismissed and according to Freud, the daughter's attitude towards her mother shifts because "a daughter sees her mother only as someone who deprives her first of milk, then of sexual gratification, finally of a penis" (Chodorow 95).

In discussing her own mother, Rich stresses the difficulties of their relationship, as she felt that the mother had chosen her husband at the expense of her daughters. This prioritization of the man not only weakens the relationship between the mother and the daughters, but also instils the idea of inferiority onto the young women through fulfilling first the needs of the man and only then the need of the female child (*Of Woman Born* 222).

Rich then inspects the nature of the mother/daughter relationship in patriarchy. While the relationship between two women, especially those connected through pregnancy and birth, should be the closest one, it is trivialized by patriarchy as, similarly to other female relationships, the bond "between mother and daughter has been profoundly threatening to men" (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 226).

A crucial concept in examining mother/daughter relationships is matrophobia. Lynn Sukenick, who established the term, describes it as the fear of becoming one's mother. This is typically connected to the domestic role of the mother which the daughter attempts to escape. Rich further explicates the concept:

> Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (*Of Woman Born* 236)

Seeing the unsatisfied mother, the daughter attempts to separate herself from the life the mother has lived. She thus breaks the close mother/daughter bond solely to distance herself from the oppressive patriarchal roles the mother presents. For the daughter, refusing the domesticity her mother represents is the only means of entering the public sphere of men, who establish themselves as individuals.

Closely connected to matrophobia is the worship of another woman, who is usually the polar opposite of the "biological one, who represents the culture of domesticity, male-centeredness, of conventional expectations" (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 247). However, the admiration of the alternative life often leads to oscillation between the domestic mother role and the public figure of the independent women, which causes friction, dissatisfaction, and most of all guilt for not being able to fulfil both entirely.

Furthermore, Rich argues that only a woman aware of her worth outside of her relationship with a man can provide sufficient mothering and will not transfer her doubts and fears onto the daughter. Rich, however, perceives this as extremely difficult in patriarchy which constantly diminishes women's existence (*Of Woman Born* 245).

2.1.2 "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law"

The ten-part title poem of the 1963 *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* collection was published after an eight-year break since *The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems* and is the first one Rich wrote after the birth of her sons (Stein 179). It was also in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* where Rich started to date all of her poems, as "she believed in the close relationship between personal life and art" (Birkle 118). Through dating the poetry, Rich

points to her being a witness in time. A significant shift is noticeable between her preceding collections and *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law,* as in the latter Rich began to "face the hard questions of poetry and experience" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* xix). As well as that, the poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" serves as a steppingstone into the looser, less regular, and formal nature of Rich's following poetry (Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 44).

The poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" provides a plethora of so-called "snapshots", each of which supplies a specific image. As a whole they create an extensive picture of female experience, both in history and present times. Among many of the snapshots, Rich offers a crucial portrayal of the mother/daughter relationship as well as the intergenerational differences between women and the uniting and separating nature of their shared experience in patriarchy. The fragmentariness of the poem was inevitably caused by Rich's own motherhood:

> The poem was jotted in fragments during children's naps, brief hours in a library, or at 3:00 A.M. after rising with a wakeful child. I despaired of doing any continuous work at this time. Yet I began to feel that my fragments and scraps had a common consciousness and a common theme, one which I would have been very unwilling to put on paper at an earlier time because I had been taught that poetry should be "universal," which meant, of course, nonfemale. (Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 44)

Therefore, Rich created a heterogenous yet complex portrait of the female experience from the perspective of both a female individual and a witness of female history. Meredith Benjamin notes the ambiguity of the links between the snapshots, claiming that while "moving from specific, intimate scenes to generalized images; the ambiguous linkages between narrator and the woman or women described produce the same effect: they are connected, but still separate" (632). This ambiguity and unclear linking of the fragmented snapshots were heavily criticized by Rich's own father, who deemed the poem incomprehensible. It is however exactly this form-focused, traditional approach to poetry that Rich challenges in her later poetry (Benjamin 633).

The poem's first part describes an older woman and her worrisome reliance on the past as perceived through the eyes of a daughter-in-law, a woman of a younger generation:

You, once a belle in Shreveport,
with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud,
still have your dresses copied from that time,
[…]

Your mind now, moldering like wedding-cake,
heavy with useless experience, rich
with suspicion, rumor, fantasy, (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 145)

Discussing the mother's youth as a belle and depicting her looks, the poet refers to the mother's dependence on the past and the values it represents. The second stanza illustrates the present state of the mother, using singularly the description of the mind, claiming it is "heavy with useless experience" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 145). The mother has lived her life in a different time, in a different way than the daughter does and that creates a conflict. Sielke notes that "if the mother could not shake off the self-destructive mold, the daughter will" (139). The daughter refuses the same life the mother has lived, one riddled with domesticity and the patriarchal perception of a woman solely as a caregiver, and instead she "grows another way" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 145). This points to the issue of matrophobia which Rich discussed in the "Motherhood and Daughterhood" essay.

The second snapshot, however, shows the daughter-in-law in the same domestic life she resents:

Banging the coffee-pot into the sink
she hears the angels chiding, and looks out
past the raked gardens to the sloppy sky.
Only a week since They said: *Have no patience.*

The next time it was: *Be insatiable*.
Then: *Save yourself; others you cannot save*.
Sometimes she's let the tapstream scald her arm,
a match burn to her thumbnail,

or held her hand above the kettle's snout

right in the woolly steam. They are probably angels,
since nothing hurts her any more, except
each morning's grit blowing into her eyes. (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 145)

Although she attempts to detach herself from the patriarchal standards imposed onto women, she is still bound by the same laws the mother is. She is deeply unsatisfied with her domesticity, which leaves her indolent and numb. The angels she hears are representative of her own mind telling her to escape the unsatisfactory life before it is too late. Feeling guilty, she transforms the voices in her head into supernatural beings to shift the blame.

The third part displays two women in an argument. The lines show the intergenerational perpetuation of the female experience by women: "The argument *ad feminam*, all the old knives / that have rusted in my back, I drive in yours" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 146). Not only has the mother-in-law struggled in the domestic role of a caregiver, but instead of providing help and support, she enforces the same path onto the younger woman.

The sixth part of the poem stresses the impact of the domestic role on a woman. The woman is "before / an unlocked door, that cage of cages" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 147), painfully aware that the home is her own prison, from which she is unable to escape due to the expectations of the patriarchal society. The lines "Pinned down / by love, for you the only natural action" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 147) emphasize the caregiver role a woman is supposed to fulfil. To further highlight the domesticity, the last three lines discuss the household books meant to be shown to the daughter-in-law, which have been kept from the son, as he simply does not need to acquire the knowledge typically deemed female: "has Nature shown / her household books to you, daughter-in-law, / that her sons never saw?" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 147)

The poem explores a variety of other themes regarding the female experience, yet they are all connected by the notion of intergenerational transmission of knowledge and expectations imposed on women in patriarchy. In the end, Rich provides an understanding that marriage and motherhood as patriarchal institutions have "[f]ew applicants for that honor" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 148).

2.1.3 "Sibling Mysteries"

In contrast to "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law", which focuses mainly on the conflict between the two women of different generations and the issue of matrophobia, "Sibling Mysteries" charts the primary nurturing relationship between a mother and her daughters. The poem, written in 1976, and first published in *The Dream of a Common Language* collection, is dedicated to Rich's sister Cynthia and it serves as a testimony of women's relationships in patriarchy. As well as examining the relationships of women, which are significantly impaired or even prohibited by the patriarchal society, Rich "clearly promotes separatism as the only way for women to liberate themselves from male oppression" (Birkle 150) through equating "father and patriarchy and mother and community of women" (Birkle 150).

The poem first employs lines that resonate throughout the whole poem – "remind me," "hold me," "tell me". Through those the poet attempts to assure herself of her knowledge of the past and of the female experience. The addressee of the verbs is the sister to whom the poem is dedicated and to whom the poet speaks.

Stein claims these refrains "stress the need to retell the old stories, for the oral tradition which must be passed on is the only repository of a history missing from the official written sources" (87). This can be specifically seen in the first part of the poem, which provides images of the general female experience in history: "Remind me how we walked / trying the planetary rock / for foothold", "Remind me how the stream / wetted the clay between our palms" (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 47). While the poet is certain of these things, she needs to be reassured of them, as the patriarchal society tends to dismiss the female experience.

While the poem undeniably serves as a portrayal of the relationship between two sisters, it also documents their roles as daughters, in the relationship to both their mother and their father. The second part of the poem explores the primary nurturing relationship between the mother and her daughters:

> Remind me how we loved our mother's body
> our mouths drawing the first
> thin sweetness from her nipples

our faced dreaming hour on hour
in the salt smell of her lap Remind me
how her touch melted childgrief

how she floated great and tender in our dark
or stood guard over us
against our willing (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 48)

The mother is the first person that provides an intimate, nurturing relationship as well as the feeling of love and safety. As a contrast to the nurturing presence of the mother is introduced the father:

and how we thought she loved
the strange male body first
that took, that took, whose taking seemed a law

and how she sent us weeping
into that law
how we remet her in our childbirth visions (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 48)

The first stanza points to what Rich has written in the "Motherhood and Daughterhood" essay. When describing her own relationship with her mother Rich notes that "[f]or years, I felt my mother had chosen my father over me, had sacrificed me to his needs and theories" (*Of Woman Born* 222). The poet directly notes that the daughters thought the mother loved "the strange male body first". The father is also depicted as somebody "whose taking seemed a law" (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 48). Birkle notes that "Rich turns the father figure into the epitome of evil for women" as he "turns into a type, a patriarchal presence dominating all generations" (144, 145). Furthermore, the last line of the part conjures up the patriarchal tendency to diminish female relationships, as the poet proclaims that "woman's flesh was made taboo to us" (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 49).

The third part of the poem focuses on the transition of the daughters into wives. Again referring to men as "the strange male bodies" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 49) she

shows the drastic separation of the daughters from the female body they knew since birth and how the women are forced to discover the male body they find strange, different, even intimidating. Later on, the poet discusses rituals traditionally performed by women throughout history and how these connected them with one another. The women are "dwelt into two worlds", "the kingdom of sons," (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 49) – the patriarchal society which secludes women, and the world of daughters and mothers in which they are able to share their experience and empower one another.

The interconnectedness and shared experience are further explored in the following part:

> Tell me again because I need to hear
> how we bore our mother-secrets
> straight to the end
>
> tied in unlawful rags
> between our breasts
> muttered in blood
>
> in looks exchanged at the feast
> where the fathers sucked the bones
> and struck their bargains (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 49, 50)

Spears recognizes the mother-secrets as female knowledge "shared by mothers, daughters and all women alike, passed from generation to generation, but which would be misunderstood or threatened by men" (63). The women exchange these secrets "at the feasts / where the fathers […] struck their bargains" (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 50), which yet again professes their domestic role, emphasizes the patriarchal perception of the female knowledge as less vital, as it is whispered in the background of men's world. The following stanza further identifies the shared experience of the sisters and their mother as the "sister gazed at sister / reaching through mirrored pupils / back to the mother" (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 50).

The fifth part of the poem opens with a diary entry from 1963, where the poet describes the distance between herself and her sister. The poet then details the differences

and similarities between the two sisters, who have lived their life differently, yet their lives were "driven down the same dark canal" (Rich *The Dream of a Common Language 51*) of female inferiority in patriarchal society. Regardless of the approach the women adopted to fight their hardships, it was patriarchy that forced them to struggle the same way. This shared experience brings the women together as "they can find a basis for love in their immemorial inheritance as women" (Spencer 154).

The last part of the poem further reiterates the necessity of female relationships and the effect patriarchy has on them:

> The daughters never were
> true brides of the father
>
> the daughters were to begin with
> brides of the mother
>
> then brides of each other
> under a different law (Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* 52)

The lines disagree with the patriarchal focus on the father/daughter relationship and instead reinforce the need for the mother/daughter relationship. Spears argues that the "primary connection between mother and daughter and the secondary connection between sisters" "leave no room for a father-daughter connection with the same strength, no matter what societal assumptions may say about the daughter 'belonging' to the father" (64). Were it not for patriarchy, the female relationships, especially the one between a mother and a daughter, would be much stronger and would carry greater significance in the lives of women. Instead, these relationships are made taboo as the daughters grow older, since the female relationships threaten the position of men.

2.2 A Wife

2.2.1 "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"

Adrienne Rich's perception of marriage and heterosexual relationships is strongly affected by the notion of compulsory heterosexuality. The premise of the idea is that heterosexuality is not in fact the default sexuality for most women, but rather something that

is ingrained into the very core of patriarchy and thus it is something that is not typically challenged or questioned. Then, the divergence from compulsory heterosexuality that is lesbian existence is perceived as "a marginal or less 'natural' phenomenon, as mere 'sexual preference,' or as the mirror image of either heterosexual or male homosexual relations" (Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 632).

Similarly to Rich, the works of Shulamith Firestone inspect the idea of compulsory heterosexuality. According to Firestone, the oppressive nature of heterosexuality lies within the institution of the nuclear family, and thus the only means of breaking the compulsory nature of heterosexuality is through "undoing the link between families and reproduction" (Gerhard 97).

Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" was first published in 1980. It provides an insight into "the dominant elements of cultural feminism: lesbian separatism, theories of women's psychological difference, and the antipornography movement" (Gerhard 179). According to Deborah L. Madsen, the radical feminist theory, that compulsory heterosexuality is a crucial element of, perceives female sexuality as one of the key means of female oppression in patriarchy (153).

Rich first introduces compulsory heterosexuality as a bias "through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 632). The foremost reasons for exploring institutionalized heterosexuality are the restriction of women's relationships with other women, be it sexual or platonic relationships, as well as the disregard of lesbian existence in literature, including feminist writings. In addition, Rich deems the perception of female homosexuality as "alternative life-style" inadequate ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 632).

When discussing lesbian reality, Rich opposes the use of the term "lesbianism" which she finds limiting, even clinical in associations, and instead proposes the terms lesbian existence and lesbian continuum which "include a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that as woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 648). Through describing the lesbian existence and continuum, the variety of woman-identified experiences is acknowledged and thus it breaks

the taboo of women's relationships in a patriarchal society. The woman identification, which was recognized already in the 1970 Radicalesbians manifesto, provides a source of female power that opposes the patriarchal perception of lesbian existence and enforced sexuality (Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 657).

The basis for Rich's argument is the initial emotional bond everybody shares with their mother:

> If women are the earliest sources of emotional caring and physical nurture for both female and male children, it would seem logical, from a feminist perspective at least, to pose the following questions: whether the search for love and tenderness in both sexes does not originally lead toward women; why in fact women would ever redirect that search; why species-survival, the means of impregnation, and emotional/erotic relationships should ever have become so rigidly identified with each other; and why such violent strictures should be found necessary to enforce women's total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men. ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 637)

While the young man is expected to maintain the close bond he once had with his mother with other women, the woman is supposed to shift her intimate feelings onto men. While patriarchal society deems this a natural process, it is frequently done in rather drastic ways, which include diminishing relationships between women.

Rich notes Kathleen Gough's essay "The Origins of the Family," which provides characteristics of male power and which Rich employs as a framework for her inspection of compulsory heterosexuality. These characteristics chart the means through which men dominate women in patriarchy. Firstly, it is the denial of female sexuality, through "punishment, including death, for female adultery, […] for lesbian sexuality; […] and destruction of documents relating to lesbian existence" (Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 638). This is followed by enforcing male sexuality through rape, domestic violence, arranged and child marriage, etc.

In addition, female labour is exploited through the institutions of marriage and motherhood, and through the "male control of abortion, contraception, and childbirth" (Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 639). Among other forms of male power exercised in patriarchy are the denial of female education and dismissal of female

(especially lesbian) history, or the father-right and removal of children from their mothers (Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 639, 640).

Furthermore, Rich explores the way pornography transmits the idea that "women are natural sexual prey to men and love it; that sexuality and violence are congruent" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 641). Correspondingly, Madsen notes that the objectification of women in general is what provides a dangerous image of male dominance as sexually arousing, which then normalizes violence against women in heterosexual relationships (155).

The nature of heterosexual marriage is explored within the text. Not only is it enforced through the means previously mentioned, but its economic nature needs to be discussed as well:

> Women have married because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women because coming out of "abnormal" childhoods they wanted to feel "normal," and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment. We may faithfully or ambivalently have obeyed the institution, but our feelings – and our sensuality – have not been tamed or contained within it. ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 654)

Despite the oppression that marriage may bring, it is still convenient to remain in such a relationship. If a woman decides to leave, she loses the economic and social privileges acquired through marriage and instead is considered an outcast, abnormal and even deviant, whatever the reason for her decision is. Rich, however, asks the question of whether all heterosexual relationships are condemnable, yet she does not provide an answer ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 659). Martha E. Thompson offers a possible solution in her commentary: "If we focus on the contradictions among different types of female-male relationships, we can gather knowledge about the weak links, knowledge we can use to develop strategies for change" (792).

2.2.2 "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"

The poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is an evident example of Rich's perception of heterosexual marriage and its oppressive nature. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is one of Rich's

most frequently anthologized poems and it appeared in her first collection of poetry *A Change of World* (1951), which was praised by many male critics. W. H. Auden, in his foreword to the collection (qtd. in Birkle), claimed the poems are "neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders" (Birkle 154). By following the imposed poetic rules Rich managed to appeal to critics who praised the traditional form yet disregarded the feminist theme of the poems. Stein notes that the collection is "both stylistically and thematically conservative" (26). Rich acknowledges the obedience to the patriarchal literary tradition. In the essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" written in 1971, she recognizes that her "style was formed first by male poets" (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 39), as well as the fact that she distances herself from the persona and theme "by the formalism of the poem, by its objective, observant tone" (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 40).

The distancing within the poem, however, is not only performed through the traditional form but also through the creation of the persona of Aunt Jennifer. Rich notes that she thought she "was creating a portrait of an imaginary woman" (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 40) and that the woman was a person as different from herself as possible. Nevertheless, there are clear instances in the poem where Rich utilizes her own experience. Similarly to Aunt Jennifer, whose only escape is her art, "the woman writer is pressured between the will to create and her subservient role in male/female relationships" (Shima 45, 46). The autobiographic inspiration for the poem, recognized by Rich only later on, is also caused by the time period during which the poem was written. Birkle argues that, since in 1951 Friedan's idea of "the problem that has no name" was not yet named, it could not be understood, not even by Rich herself (156, 157).

The short and concise three-stanza poem provides an image of a woman constrained in marriage. Rich also acknowledges the value of the woman as an artist and not only as a wife. Aunt Jennifer's art, however, is her only means of showing her strength:

> Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
> Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
> They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
> They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand. (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 4)

The poet shows a clear opposition between her artistry and her position in marriage. In her art she portrays freedom in the form of the tigers who "do not fear the men", whereas in reality she is weakened by marriage and the oppression it brought about. For Aunt Jennifer, art is a means of showing defiance, yet even this minute form of resistance is strenuous as she finds "even the ivory needle hard to pull." Birkle notes that although the art "expresses as person's secrets inside" it is dangerous "if the artist is a woman who cannot but work against the social norms" (155). Despite her silent effort to profess her wishes, she remains frightened by the possibility of the husband discovering the truth within her embroidery. Her art, however, is her legacy:

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid. (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 4)

Aunt Jennifer will not escape her marriage, and even after her demise she will be connected to her husband, whereas her art, the tigers that she embroidered, "[w]ill go on prancing, proud and unafraid." Her art will be a constant reminder of the freedom she so longed for yet was never able to reach herself.

2.2.3 "Twenty-One Love Poems"

"Twenty-One Love Poems" provides a stark contrast to the kind of relationship depicted in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers". The relationship in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is seen as a source of the wife's oppression, dissatisfaction, and fear, whereas "Twenty-One Love Poems" inspects a rather different relationship, one filled with intense love between two women despite the difficulties they face.

Although "Twenty-One Love Poems" does not directly discuss women as wives, it portrays them as partners and lovers, and the comparison of the two poems demonstrates the differences between the two relationships. They are rather similar in their nature, but heterosexual marriage in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is heavily affected by patriarchy, which

causes the intense dissatisfaction of the wife, whereas the lesbian relationship in "Twenty-One Love Poems" portrays a pure partnership without the need for dominance – a relationship that marriage could be, were it not for the patriarchal influence.

The sequence of twenty-two poems (one of which is unnumbered), published in 1976, is regarded as one of Rich's first openly lesbian poems (Stein 84). The poems document both the love between two female lovers, as well as the general experience of lesbians in patriarchal society. Joanne Feit Diehl notes that they attempt to "combine a self-consciousness associated with starting an alternative poetic ground based on a female homosexual relationship" (537). However, what is frequently noticed about the poems is that, despite Rich's changing tone of poetry, "Twenty-One Love Poems" is "tuned to the same poetic conventions used by Rich's male contemporaries" (Shima 66). The poems were called sonnets by Hayden Carruth, yet they depart from the conventions through using "the urban setting rather than a pastoral setting" (Stein 84). Rich has attempted to make these poems an unmistakeable portrayal of lesbian experience and she even felt angered when the poems were considered universal and not perceived as a clear depiction of lesbian experience. The sequence was thus once again "assimilated and stripped of its meaning, 'integrated' into heterosexual romance" (McGuirk 78) instead of being seen for its true value.

The first poem already provides an image of a patriarchal world within which the lesbian women face significant challenges. The poet walks through the city where "screens flicker / with pornography" (*The Fact of a Doorframe* 143), which represent the control of sexuality and female body through the patriarchy. Women are seen as objects intended to be looked at to please men. The poet states "[n]o one has imagined us" (*The Fact of a Doorframe* 143), which acknowledges the lack of accurate portrayal as well as the dismissal of lesbian existence. Thus, she is forced to "invoke texts from the masculine tradition" (McGuirk 75) in order to describe her emotion.

The poet shifts between a personal and a more general tone within her poetry. The poems IV and V portray a deep anger with the patriarchal society which diminishes efforts of women, lesbian women especially. In the poem IV the poet writes:

> And my incurable anger, my unmendable wounds
> break open further with tears, I am crying helplessly,

and they still control the world, and you are not in my arms. (Rich, *The Fact of a Doorframe* 145)

The men continue to control the world, the women continue to be oppressed, and the poet is left helpless, struggling to accept the inequality. The line "you are not in my arms" points to the patriarchal disapproval and persecution of lesbian relationships, as well as the feeling of loneliness a woman can experience in a world in which she is considered inferior and has no one to help, since female relationships are made taboo. Similarly then, the poem V explores the diminishing of female history:

centuries of books unwritten piled behind these shelves;
and we still have to stare into the absence
of men who would not, women who could not, speak
to our life—this still unexcavated hole
called civilization, this act of translation, this half-world. (Rich, *The Fact of a Doorframe* 146)

Claiming the books were unwritten, the poet recognizes the scarcity of female art and history caused by the oppressive nature of patriarchal society. The history and art existed, yet the men "would not" and the women "could not" share the female experience. Thus, through dismissing the female contribution, the society remains a "half-world", which only recognizes the male perspective.

The poem XII depicts the intimate relationship between two lovers. She portrays the intimacy of sleep, in which "a touch is enough to let us know / we're not alone in the universe" (*The Fact of a Doorframe* 149). The poet acknowledges the closeness and the need for affection. With her lover she is "most vulnerable and therefore most embattled" (McGuirk 75). However, despite them sharing the female and the lesbian experience, she highlights their differences:

But we have different voices, even in sleep,
and our bodies, so alike, are yet so different
and the past echoing through our bloodstreams
is freighted with different language, different meanings—
though in any chronicle of the world we share
it could be written with new meaning

we were two lovers of one gender,
we were two women of one generation. (Rich, *The Fact of a Doorframe* 149)

Although the interconnectedness of both their experience and their shared womanhood is undeniable, they are very different. Their past "is freighted with different language," as they had experienced different hardships. The poet recognizes the particularities that differentiate them, yet "in any chronicle of the world", one written by a man, they would be considered the same as they are "two lovers of one gender, […] two women of one generation."

"The Floating poem, Unnumbered" is rather distinct from the rest of the poems. While the others are platonic in their nature, describing mainly the emotional bond between the women, the unnumbered poem is "openly sexual and erotic" as it "compares the body of the lover to a landscape which the persona explores and travels" (Birkle 134). The poet uses the form of a poem that is typical for male poetic tradition and shifts it to describe the sexual nature of the lesbian relationship that patriarchal society so opposes.

Thus, as can be seen from the abovementioned poems, the sequence depicts the relationship in a rather different way than the marriage explored in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers". While the heterosexual marriage is described within its repressive nature and the freedom the woman desires but cannot reach in the relationship, "Twenty-One Love Poems" focuses on depicting the loving nature and intimacy between the two women. Although in the poem she claims "two women together is a work / nothing in civilization has made simple" (*The Fact of a Doorframe* 153), she refuses to give up her identity which patriarchy finds deviant and threatening. Instead, she chooses "to walk here. And to draw this circle" (*The Fact of a Doorframe* 154). She acknowledges the difficulties yet promises to fight the oppression.

2.3 A Mother

2.3.1 "Anger and Tenderness"

The essay "Anger and Tenderness" is a part of the highly influential collection of essays *Of Woman Born* (1976), which explores the nature of motherhood in patriarchy. In *Of Woman Born* Rich stresses the difference between motherhood as an experience and as a patriarchal institution. Motherhood therefore must be "understood as a political institution, historically changing, capable of being redefined" (Bowers 387).

"Anger and Tenderness" outlines Rich's experience with motherhood and introduces the concepts Rich frequently explores. It contains a number of Rich's journal entries from the time she became a mother, which provide a raw image of the woman's struggle to adapt to the role of a mother. She discusses her experience both with her children and the society surrounding her. At one point, she notes that once she was "visibly and clearly pregnant" she finally felt "not-guilty" (*Of Woman Born* 25), as she felt as if she had at last fulfilled the expectations of the patriarchal society.

When describing the relationship to her children, she addresses the "anger and tenderness" she felt as a mother:

> My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness. (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 21)

She states that the reason for the conflicting feelings is the twofold nature of motherhood – attempting to not lose her identity and sacrificing her own needs for her children. The children require constant care and affection that the mother is unable to always provide, and it leaves her feeling guilty and angry. Rich also notes that she longed for the time the husband came home, as the constant demands of the children then "slacken, because there was another adult in the house" (*Of Woman Born* 23). These feelings of undeniable anger in which the woman feels alone, being surrounded by only her children and the husband, are not unique to Rich's experience. As she writes later on, the anger toward children is rather common, yet was made taboo in the "family-centered, consumer-oriented, Freudian-American world of the 1950s" (*Of Woman Born* 25), which required women to fulfil their roles as mothers and housewives. The era of the Feminine Mystique left women with no means of understanding they were not alone in their struggles. Rich however also notes that finally "the taboos are being broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking through" (*Of Woman Born* 24, 25), and the true, unglorified nature of motherhood is being recognized.

A significant reason for this anger is the domestication of mothers. Instead of being able to realize themselves outside of the home, they are unified with the needs of the child, the husband, and the household. Rich notes that the assumption that "a 'natural' mother is a

person without further identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children, living at a pace turned to theirs" (*Of Woman Born* 22) is extremely harmful to mothers. Without these assumptions being examined, women are left alone in their struggle of isolation, anger, and guilt, as this experience "was not sanctioned by popular views of mothers" (Jeremiah 60).

The domestication of motherhood, however, is not natural. Instead, it is one of the means through which patriarchal society controls women. Rich explores the nature of this oppression:

> My individual, seemingly private pains as a mother, the individual, seemingly private pains of the mothers around me and before me, whatever our class or color, the regulation of women's reproductive power by men in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, obstetrics, gynecology, and extrauterine reproductive experiments – all are essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers. (*Of Woman Born* 33, 34)

Despite the differences in female experience, the patriarchal prescription of motherhood is ever-present. Motherhood is expected, even required by patriarchal society. Frequently women are forced into motherhood through the means of the male control of reproduction and through the social prejudice against women who choose not to become mothers. Furthermore, the ability to bear children is the reason why "women's procreative bodies have been held hostage by the patriarchy to protect the economic power and privilege of men" (McGrath 355). Thus, women essentially need to choose between the oppressive nature of motherhood and the social sanctions connected with non-mothering.

Lastly, Rich emphasized that, while it is the patriarchal institution of motherhood that brings oppression and control of the woman, "[m]otherhood, in the sense of an intense, reciprocal relationship with a particular child, or children, is one part of the female process; it is not an identity for all time" (*Of Woman Born* 36, 37). Thus, motherhood needs to be perceived for both its meanings – as an experience and as an institution. It is undeniably a method of controlling women's power in patriarchy and diminishing their identity to the role of a caregiver, instead of an individual (similarly to marriage, in which the woman is perceived through her relationship to a man). Despite that, however, motherhood is a strong

experience that should be recognized as only a portion of the female identity, not the sole purpose of their lives.

2.3.2 "Night-Pieces: For a Child"

Rich's poetry often depicts the topics she explores in her essays, such as the issue of compulsory heterosexuality, oppressive nature of marriage and patriarchy in general, where she utilizes her own experience. However, that is different with the topic of motherhood. Rich rarely writes about her own experience of motherhood. Upon being asked about why she does not write about her children, similarly to the male poets, she claimed that "poetry was where [she] lived as no-one's mother, where [she] existed as [herself]" (*Of Woman Born* 31). The sequence "Night-Pieces: For a Child" is one of the few poems that commemorate Rich's experience as a mother. Randall, however, argues that the poem "is less about Rich's 'maternal experience' than it is about her vision of motherhood in the Western, male literary tradition" (201). And while the poem can certainly be read as that, there are noticeable similarities between her journal entries in the essay "Anger and Tenderness" and the poem, which signals that the poet draws from her own experiences to discuss a more complex, general issue.

The first part titled "The Crib" depicts a vision of the mother's waking night. The mother watches the sleeping, dreaming child, who awakens, their eyes "still filmed in dream" (Rich, *Collected Early Poems* 223). The child starts to scream, as it looks at the mother. In that moment, the mother wonders whether the child sees the mother as "death's head, sphinx, medusa" (*Collected Early Poems* 223). The mother feels guilty for the child's fear: "Mother I no more am, / but woman, and nightmare" (*Collected Early Poems* 223). She loses herself in her mother-role and blames herself for even the nightmare that causes distress to the child. Randall perceives this not only as an individual struggle of the woman, but also a depiction of "the literary/Freudian 'shadow' that hovers over her maternal experience" (201, 202). This also closely relates to one of Rich's statements in "Anger and Tenderness", in which she reminisces about the sleepless nights, when she knows that "there would be more nightmares, more need for consolation, because out of [her] weariness [she] would rage at those children for no reason they could understand" (*Of Woman Born* 31). Perhaps the mother sees herself as a monster because of the anger she feels and acknowledges yet cannot control.

The second part, “Her Waking” again reinforces the reality of the mother’s sleepless night as she worries about her child. At the same time however, she perceives the child as drifting away from her, wishing she could hear and connect with the child for a while longer. The line “mutter some gentle animal sound” is an homage to the natural bond between a mother and her child, the deep experience without its patriarchal connotations. The woman finally proclaims her wish: “If milk flowed from my breast again…” (*Collected Early Poems* 224). With the loss of mothering, represented by the act of breastfeeding, she loses both the close, primal relationship she had with her child as well as the social approval of patriarchal society connected to motherhood.

2.3.3 “Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff”

Contrastively to the preceding poem, “Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff” is a testimony of the patriarchal institution of motherhood. The poem is prefaced with a paragraph which introduces the two artists, Paula Becker and Clara Westhoff, and their life stories. Spencer notes that the poem is “aided by surviving diaries and letters from which phrases have been borrowed” (152). Furthermore, the poem serves as a depiction of not only the individual hardships of the artists, but also the shared similarities of motherhood and marriage in patriarchy, and the crucial importance of women’s relationships.

In the introductory paragraph the reader learns about the lives of the two women. Rich describes their close friendship and the time they spent in Paris, where Paula Becker painted, and Clara Westhoff studied sculpting. Upon returning to Germany, they both got married – Westhoff to Rainer Maria Rilke, Becker to Otto Modersohn. Unfortunately, in 1907 Paula Becker died due to a haemorrhage after the birth of her child (*The Dream of a Common Language* 42).

The poem is written in “personal-letter-like narration” (Shima 69), in which the hardships of the women are described through the eyes of Paula Becker. Already within the first lines the deep desperateness Paula feels is expressed:

> The moon rolls in the air. I didn’t want this child.
> You’re the only one I’ve told.
> I want a child maybe, someday, but not now. (*The Dream of a Common Language* 42)

The woman feels guilty and confused in her thoughts as she did not desire to become a mother. She claims that her friend was the only one she confided in, meaning she had not shared her doubts with her husband. This clearly points to the expectation of becoming a mother that is imposed on women through patriarchy. Pregnancy and motherhood are regarded as an aim of female life, action that will fulfil her, yet her own individual feelings are disregarded in that process. The only person she can share her doubts with is her female friend who has experienced similar hardships.

What perhaps scares Paula the most about her upcoming motherhood is the inescapable unification of the mother and the child: "this child will be mine / not his, the failures, if I fail / will be all mine" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 42). Paula knows that whatever happens to the child, the mother will be to blame. This "double commitment to self and child" (Shima 69) is extremely tiring and endless. Paula claims that: "We're not good, Clara, / at learning to prevent these things, / and once we have a child, it is ours" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 42). Being able to voice her opinion about postponing her motherhood seems nearly impossible in the patriarchal society, and once the child is born, she knows she will lose her identity as an individual, as an artist.

Paula is aware that her husband does not fully comprehend the female strengths and emphasizes the difference between Rainer and Otto, claiming Rainer: "believes in women. But he feeds on us, / like all of them" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 43). In the essay "Mother and Son, Woman and Man" Rich explores texts by Rilke, in which his strongly patriarchal attitude toward women is evident. In the excerpt, Rilke (qtd. in *Of Woman Born*) claims that "[f]or the woman – according to my conviction – a child is a completion and a liberation from all strangeness and insecurity: it is, spiritually too, the mark of maturity" (*Of Woman Born* 191). By claiming that bearing a child fulfils woman, he essentially dismisses the female worth as an individual, only limiting her to her abilities to reproduce and care. According to Rilke, the woman artist who has had a child is "capable of reaching all the artistic heights the man can" (*Of Woman Born* 191), which again suggests the worship of the idealized motherhood as an experience which completes women, entirely disregarding the limitations a woman faces in motherhood.

The poem explores the "primacy of the women's relationship" (Shima 70) as well as the existence of the lesbian continuum, which highlight the close intimate relationships

between women, even those that are not of a romantic or sexual nature. Frequently throughout the poem, the closeness and uniqueness of the bond between the two women is evident. Firstly, Paula confides in Clara about her deepest secrets she refuses to share with her husband. Later, she mentions Rilke and her own marriage, claiming she was jealous, and that "maybe [she] married Otto to fill up / [her] loneliness for [Clara]" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 43). Paula thus knows she misses the close bond between herself and Clara and recognizes the possibility that she married because she missed the closeness they once had. Lastly, she describes a dream she had, where Rilke called her his friend, yet she emphasizes that she was Clara's friend. Regretfully she proclaims: "Clara, why don't I dream of you?" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 44) This is another signal of the patriarchal oppression of women, as "[e]ven the dream world is affected by men who speak for women, define women, dominate the modes of expression" (Shima 70).

Conclusion

The main objective of this thesis was to analyse the works of Adrienne Rich in the attempt to depict how patriarchy utilizes the female gender roles of a daughter, a wife, and a mother to control, limit, and dominate women, and to chart Rich's portrayal of the female frustration with the confinement within these roles.

The male-focused institution of patriarchy had an undoubted effect on female gender roles, as it frequently created unattainable expectations through which women were controlled. These tendencies can be seen throughout history, from the earliest societies until the present day (Lerner 239). The twentieth century, however, saw a rise of feminism, and these preposterous, limiting notions of womanhood were finally challenged. Thanks to the rigorous work of the first and the second-wave feminists, female rights changed drastically over the last century. Despite that, as Rich insinuated with her discussion of the lesbian continuum and androgyny, there are still rather pressing issues, and the fight for female rights is far from over. Rich's works, both essays and poems, focus on a wide variety of urgent matters, and their feminist tendencies and ambitions cannot be overlooked. While Rich's poetry and essays focus on subjects including lesbian existence or androgyny, her criticism of patriarchy, and the way patriarchal society impinges on women's lives through conditioning women into submissive gender roles, mainly those of a daughter, a wife, and a mother, is ever-present throughout her career.

Rich's perception of daughterhood and the upbringing of women reflects both the substantial differences in male and female upbringing, as well as the dismissal of the mother/daughter relationship. The essay "Motherhood and Daughterhood" provides an insight into the patriarchal perception of daughterhood, already heavily influenced by the patriarchal ideals of male dominance, and the societal disregard of the importance of relationships between women. Rich's poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" charts the intergenerational rift between women and the notions they symbolise as the younger woman rejects the detrimental patriarchal stereotypes. Contrastively then, "Sibling Mysteries" emphasizes the taboo that women's relationships in patriarchy are, and the deep longing for these relationships.

Furthermore, in Rich's works, marriage is seen as another institution designed to limit women. One of her most anthologized poems "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" expresses this

notion, as it depicts a woman dominated by her husband, scared to express herself. Rich's perception of marriage is similar to that of Friedan's *Feminine Mystique,* as in patriarchy, mainly in the post-war 1950s, marriage was seen as the foremost purpose of a woman's life, yet even once she reaches this supposed goal, she is left unsatisfied. As a contrast to the domineering, limiting nature of marriage, Rich positions lesbian relationships, as can be seen in the sequence of poems "Twenty-One Love Poems". Despite the significant disapproval from the patriarchal society, the women are shown to be satisfied with their relationship, which is free of the patriarchal need for female submission and limitation.

Lastly, motherhood is another prominent subject of Rich's works. She attributes a dual nature to motherhood, of both a profound experience between a woman and her child, and of a patriarchal institution, which she considers the most flagrant means of oppression, as it leads to the unification of the mother with the needs and failures of her child, completely dismissing the mother's worth as an individual. Rich primarily focuses on motherhood in her essays, mainly in the collection *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience & Institution.* In the essay "Anger and Tenderness" she delineates the twofold nature of motherhood, as it simultaneously fills the woman with joy and intense, incomprehensible anger. Rich maps her own experience, as well as the experiences of many other mothers, who felt deviant for not fitting the perfect image of the joyous mother. This rift can also be seen in the poems "Night-Pieces: For a Child" and "Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff".

The works of Adrienne Rich thus provide an insight into the hardships women face when attempting to fit into the very narrow and restrictive gender roles defined by patriarchal society. At the same time, however, they portray the admirable efforts of women attempting to demolish these barriers for generations to come and are thus a tremendously valuable representation of female resistance against the male-dominated society.

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